

Chapter 105

Peacebuilding, Media, and Terrorism in 21st Century and Beyond: A Psychological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century faced challenges that undermine peace and harmony among humankind on the planet earth. Apart from scary man made environmental related calamities, the 21st century emerged with the mass media era, where the internet, digital and social media based threats and terrorizing propaganda has catapulted to unspeakable and unprecedented extreme radicalization from all over the globe. The propaganda messages are spread at the lightning speed, from one end of the globe to another instantly, and impacts of the outcomes shake the core of humanity from psychological, political, and socio-economic aspects as well. Through available literature, this chapter examines the impacts of digital media to peace and conflict resolution, and investigates the psychosocial aspects and modules or hypotheses of media and paths to terrorism behavior as well. Hypotheses suggest a strong link leading to association between digital media and pathways to terrorism and associated psychological impacts.

INTRODUCTION

One may argue that digital media has nothing to do with the human brain or human behavior. However, the most recent research published by American Psychological Association (APA, 2016) suggests that more than 52% of American people, on both axes of parties, have experienced high level of stress due to the news they watch or read related to the negative aspects of election-based news.

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In a developmental perspective, young and fresh brain structure is vulnerability and can be distorted and easily diverted. To better understand this phenomenon, study Pavlov, the infamous Russian psychologist, and his theory of learning, classical conditioning and related behavior observations in 1902 as developed by Watson and other scientists (McLeod, 2013).

Additionally, as far as risk factors are concerned, without prior knowledge or strong awareness of the outcome of media to human brain and consciousness (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013), it is easy for the brain structure of the target to fall prey to the negative influence of intentionally biased or negative digital media sources (Lender, 2014). This is even more true in information processing during early stages of human brain development, especially for the children and adolescents, and is the main reason why children and adolescents or youth in general become the first victims due to their physiological and developmental vulnerability. Parents remain helpless as victims come to lack a set of skills and adequate knowledge to deal with potential negative impacts of digital media and the like (Ratner, 2014).

The development of the Internet and its subsequent spread of mass interest and utilization in the late 90s has generated more sophistication and more behavior with criminal intent despite some positive outcomes. Furthermore, various terror groups have adapted digital and social media as the ultimate tool for their abhorrent barbaric acts and propaganda (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2011).

Besides the Al-Queda terror group that shook the entire world on 9/11 and the Taliban militia groups that have ravaged Afghanistan for decades, the most recent case is the self-claimed Islamic State (ISIS, IS or ISIL), an extremely cruel and extreme radical group that has terrorized and heavily jeopardized the peace of mind of humankind beginning in 2014 (Solomon, 2016).

To better understand the ISIS phenomenon, it is important to analyze it through psychological, social neuroscience lenses, and its implications for associated human reaction and behavior: gain, fear, feeling of achievement, ego, distorted self-actualization, personality traits and mental state perspectives. Furthermore, the digital era has demonstrated serious impact on the young generation and the evidence suggests that the majority of target groups affected by negative forces such as terror groups and the like are children and youth. As it has long been known, prosperous and long-lasting nations rely on a healthy and undisturbed young generation.

Conversely, evidence also suggests that negative impacts on early childhood and adolescence predict a challenging future filled with uncertainty and anxiety. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the phenomenon of digital media and terrorism through a psychosocial model of digital media and its potential impact on human beings, with emphasis on young people, and possible comprehensive solutions.

Objectives

This chapter explores different aspects of risk factors associated with digital media and the sharp rise of conflict in the world, through analysis of relevant cases studies.

The main objectives are:

1. Comprehensive psychological analysis of the role of digital and social media in fueling conflict.
2. In-depth appraisal of digital media and information processing mechanisms of the human brain
3. Analysis of the positive and constructive mechanisms of digital media potential for peacebuilding among young generations.

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